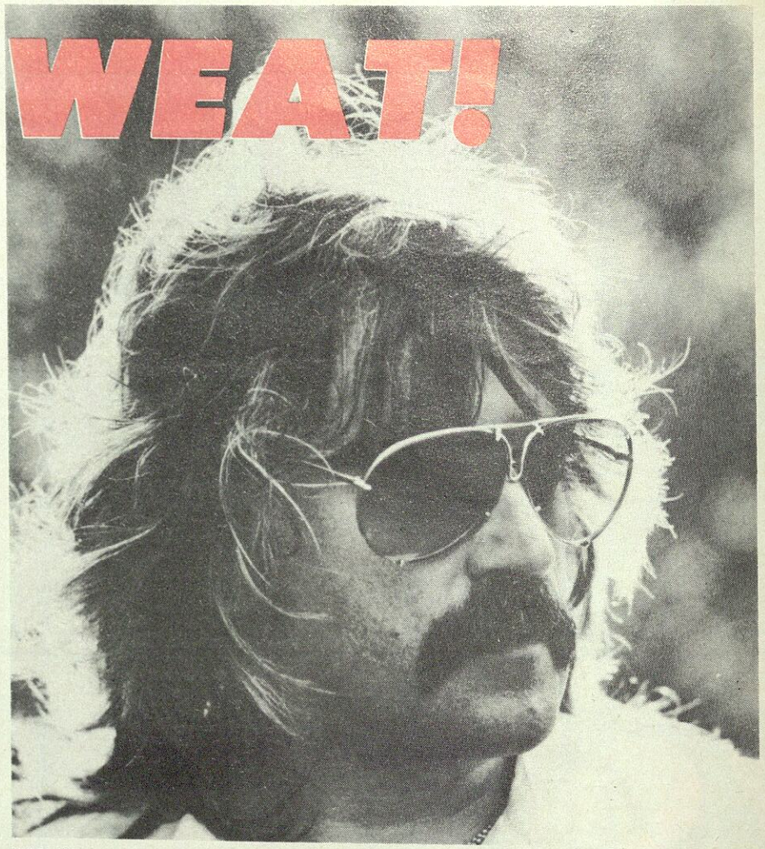
NO SWEAT!



'I don't want to sound big-headed but the new Snake album will set standards! 'Come An' Get It' was a little restrained but the new one 'Saints And Sinners' lets all hell loose.'

His solo album, Whitesnake and strangling Glenn Hughes. An unruffled Jon Lord talks to Howard Johnson about them all

"I'M MUCH more self-confident now than I was with Purple. Whitesnake has made me feel good. We were under pressure in Purple — blazing a trail for a new music and learning on stage, whereas Whitesnake is more relaxed. We're blazing our own trail but the music is established."

Jon Lord leans back into a comfy chair at EMI Records' London headquarters, puffs slowly on a cigarette and looks at me through smoke-tinted shades. He does indeed look more relaxed, the picture of health — tanned, immaculately dressed and with long, clean (if grey) hair. Not what you might expect. In view of Whitesnake's recent internal troubles, with both guitarists leaving to pursue their own careers, a certain trace of worry would only be natural. Don't you believe it! Let the grand old Duke of Rock explain the situation to all of you who've been charmed by the 'Snake:

"David's had a legal problem with contracts, but as soon as they're sorted out we'll be back on the road. That's the only thing that's bugging me now. I just want to get out and play. I went to see Ry Cooder recently and I was bloody jealous. I was in the stalls and I felt like jumping up on stage.

"I really miss playing live, and I wouldn't mind doing five or six smallish gigs around the country to promote my solo album. But I don't want to add fuel to any split rumours. I'd only do the tour if I thought the public would like to hear the music on my album."

Ah yes, Jon's album. *That*, and not Whitesnake split rumours, is the reason for our meeting. I'd better carry on before I forget. Which reminds me, 'Before I Forget' is the title of the Lord LP.

"The ideas for the album have been trundling around in my head for a few years now and as I don't like inactivity, this seemed a good time to get out and do something. The record is vaguely autobiographical and is very personal to me. I didn't want to do the same kind of album I did in 1975 with an orchestra, I wanted to record with just a few friends. It's an introspective work and it came out a little gentler than I expected. Jon Lord and Whitesnake fans must occasionally want to be introspective and I'd rather they did so with my music than Barry Manilow's. Side one has the 'up' tracks and side two contains the 'down' numbers so you can choose your mood."

It doesn't sound as if here speaks a man who is hungry for rock!

"Well as there's no financial pressure on me I can afford to be a little more esoteric, but it's a long time since Purple and I'm no millionaire. I'd like to see the album sell and see people accept it as a personal statement. The next one will be a little more angry!

"I've got three guys from Bad Company playing on 'Before I Forget' as well as Simon Phillips, Ian Paice and many others. I wanted as many musicians as possible to bounce off musically. I didn't want to give the impression that I was forming a band. It *is* a solo album and so I hope that my style gives it an identity, even though I'm using a wide range of musicians. I've played it through a few times and it seems to hang together. I hope it's not just a rag-bag of ideas."

Certainly the album represents more than the Jon Lord Indulgence Hour (or rather 40 minutes). The 'bouncing off' seems to have worked.

"Well, I *can* get inspiration from within myself but other musicians often add things that aren't there at all to begin with, which is why Purple was so good. Playing with Blackmore was no Sunday picnic. He's a very demanding musician to play with but that put a magnificent tension into our music. The two of us used to have battles on stage, chucking licks at each other and saying by the looks on our faces: 'What can you do with that?' I thoroughly enjoyed it.

"When Blackers got a little disinterested in Purple around the time of 'Stormbringer' the heart went out of the band and in hindsight we should've stopped then. You can't make good music when someone isn't pulling their weight, so I knew exactly what I wanted for my next album having been through it all before. God rest Tommy Bolin, but he couldn't fill Blacker's shoes — the bouncing off failed."

This would seem to indicate that Jon enjoys working with demanding musicians who give him a hard time. Masochism for professionalism, eh?

"Yes, but that's the only way to succeed. David's a very demanding musician. He drains himself to the nth degree and expects the rest of the band to do the same. Then again, I'm demanding of the musicians I play with. The worst argument arising from those demands came in 1975 when Glenn Hughes started living on the moon, instead of firmly and squarely on the earth, where he should be. His playing suffered and he became a very silly boy. To him, he was brilliant but to me, the rest of the band and the audience he was patently not delivering.

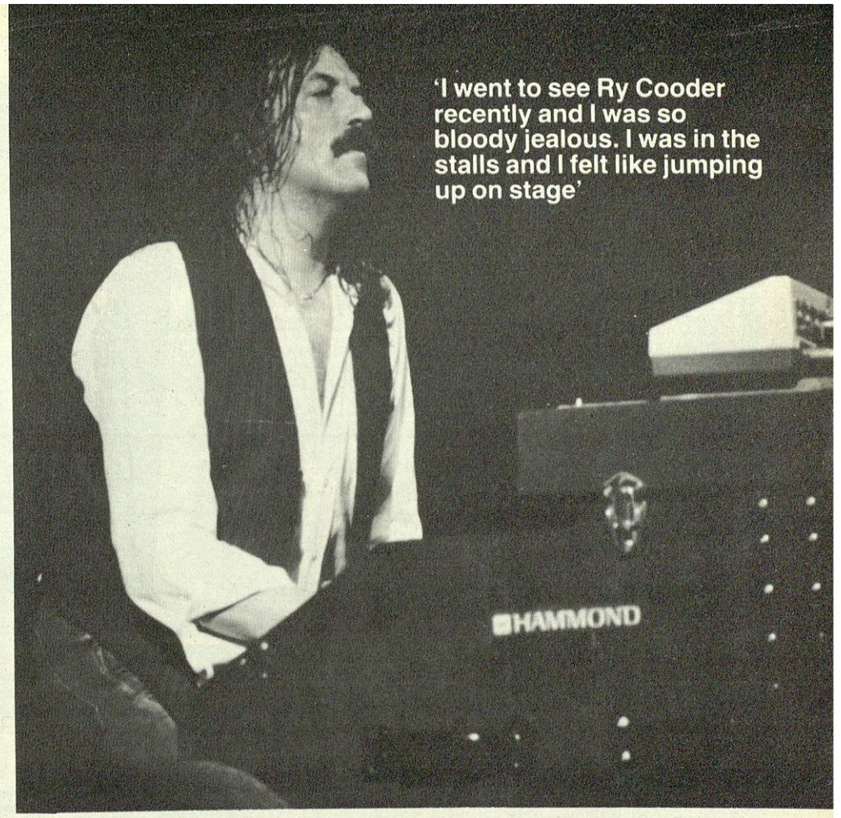
"I remember once discovering myself with both hands round his throat, holding him against a wall backstage at a gig in Idaho. He'd come screaming off stage having just played like a lunatic and had then announced that he wouldn't go back for an encore because the audience didn't deserve it! The next thing I remember was someone pulling me off him. I'ts the only time I've resorted to violence in order to get my ideas across, but it proves that I am demanding. I like to be surrounded by people who know what they're doing."

Naughty Jon, and he looks such a level-headed gent as he calmly lights another cigarette. This tale makes me wonder about the other side of the proverbial coin. What it's like when a band knows it's played badly and yet is still awarded an ecstatic response?

"When that happens you really do go home glum, because you know that you're being acknowledged on your past record and not on how you've performed that evening. David reacts very bitterly towards himself on those occasions, though fortunately it's only happened a couple of times with 'Snake. When you perform badly and you actually do have the capability to play well, it's usually because you don't feel too good. Yet in this business the illness is usually self-inflicted. You should never go on stage in a sub-standard condition. I did it once and it taught me never to do it again. I played an entire three to four minute organ solo on one note, though that was a long time ago now."

So Jon's famous Hammond has actually served as a bar for the great man to prop himself up on! But what about the more . . er . . conventional uses of the organ. Does he prefer it to piano and synth?

"I love piano, because that was the instrument that sparked off my interest in music. I'm wary of synths and I only use them as a means to an end. They're overtaking the ability of young musicians to actually play. The machine tends to end up playing the man and as such becomes emotionless. I don't like the cold music — the Kraftwerk syndrome, which doesn't mean that it shouldn't exist, and I don't resent it because my career has gone marvellously.

"I intend to record another solo LP as soon as possible and it may be all instrumental, as I am an instrumentalist. Besides, I sing like a drain, and then there's the new 'Snake album. I don't want to sound big-headed, but it will set standards! 'Come An' Get It' was a little restained but the new one, 'Saints And Sinners', lets all hell loose. I've done some really good keyboard work on it too. I can't wait to go 'snaking around Britain again!'

Until then, content yourself with Jon's solo album. Introspectiveness rules! As Whitesnake might say: 'He wishes you well!'